BRIEF SUMMARY OF BHAGAVAD GITA

By N. Avinashilingam

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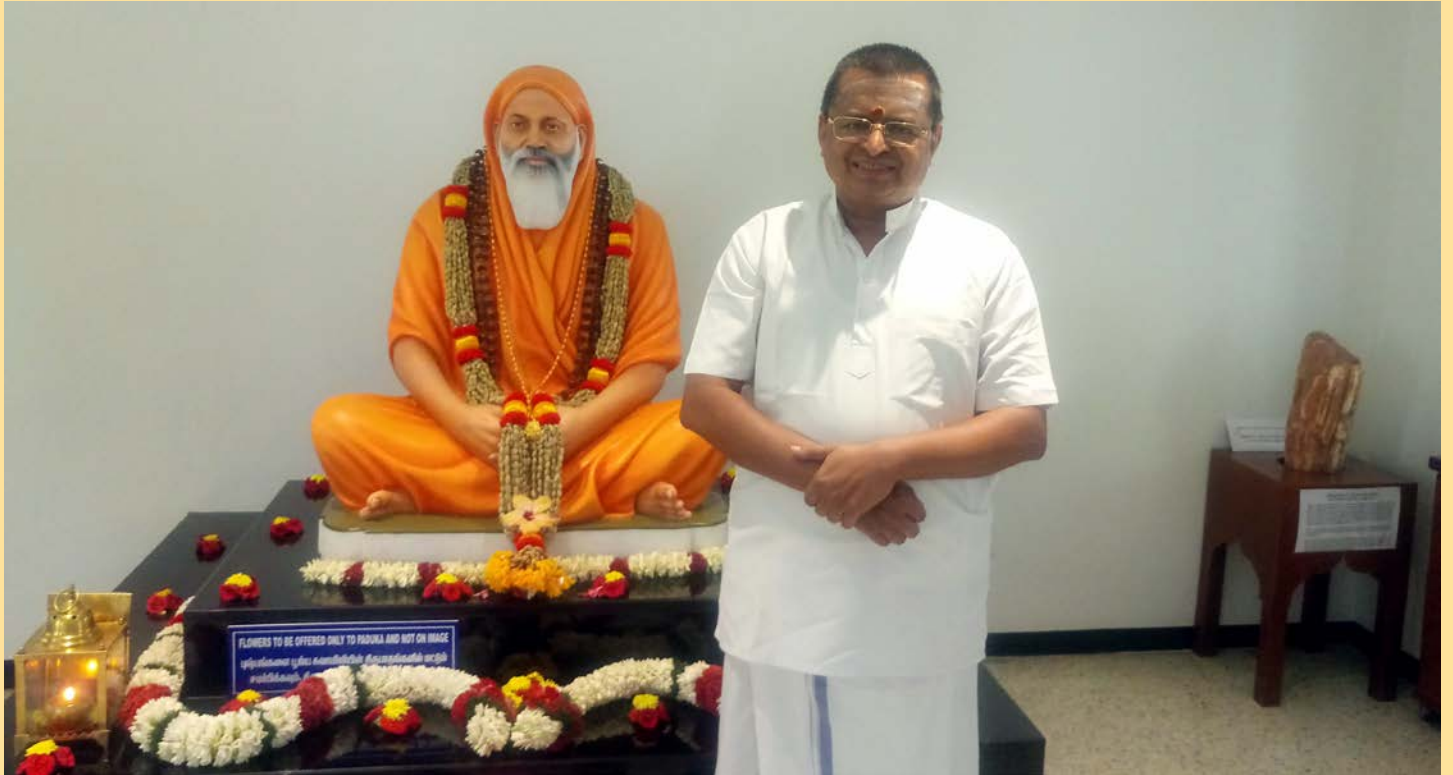
Pujya Swami Dayananda Saraswati

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BRIEF SUMMARY OF BHAGAVAD GITA

-N. Avinashilingam

Bhagavad Gita means the Lord's song. The Gita is divided into three sections; the first section (Chapters 1 to 6) explains about the *Jiva*; the second section (Chapters 7 to 12) explains about *Isvara* and the third section (Chapters 13 to 18) explains about the oneness between *Jiva* and *Isvara*. The Gita expounds the theme of the source book, the Upanishads**. Vedanta is the only *pramana* (means of knowledge) to gain *atma jnana***. Gita says that knowing oneself is the same as gaining oneness with *Isvara*.

CHAPTER I: THE TOPIC OF ARJUNA'S SORROW: *Duryodana* usurped the kingdom which rightfully belonged to the *Pandavas*. Lord Krishna went as a messenger of the *Pandavas* to the *Kauravas* to negotiate a settlement in order to avoid war. However, *Duryodana* did not yield and a war became inevitable to establish dharma. Thus, a war between the *Kauravas* and the *Pandavas* started at Kurukshetra.

Lord Krishna agreed to be Arjuna's charioteer during the war. As the war was about to begin, Arjuna asked Lord Krishna to place his chariot at a vantage point. Krishna placed it in front of their army, facing *Bhisma* and *Drona*. Seeing the people he had to fight with, **Arjuna** became afflicted with great sorrow: he **was unable to fight against his own kith and kin and his teachers.** So, he declared that he did not desire such a victory nor could he enjoy ruling a kingdom won after killing one's own kith and kin. He sat down on his chariot, overcome with grief.

CHAPTER II: THE TOPIC OF KNOWLEDGE: Lord Krishna asked Arjuna for the reason behind his sudden shying away and indifference to war. Arjuna replied that he did not want to fight with Bhisma and Drona who were worthy of his worship. He felt that it was better to live a life of a *bhikshu* (one living on alms) instead. Getting a full grasp of his own helplessness, **Arjuna saluted Lord Krishna and surrendered to him.**

He asked the Lord to teach him what *sreyas* (ultimate goal of life) was. The Lord agreed and thus the teaching of the Bhagavad Gita began from Verse 11.

Lord Krishna told Arjuna that his grief had no reason. ***Atma* is not subject to birth or death**; *atma* is *nitya*. Whenever one thinks that he is a subject, guilt is inevitable; whenever one thinks that he is an object, hurt is inevitable. *Atma* is neither the subject nor the object. ***Atma* is "being" in the form of consciousness and is free from any doer-ship.**

One is endowed with choice only over action. Proficiency in action is choosing action in accordance with *dharma*. One can choose to do an action, not to do or to do it differently. **Isvara as *karma-phala-daata* gives the results taking into various accounts, mainly his previous and present *karma***. Results can be equal to, or more, or less, or opposite of what one expects. A mature person accepts the results as *prasada* since it comes from Isvara alone. This attitude is called *samatvam,* born out of understanding. **Performing one's action with an attitude of offering to *Isvara* and accepting the result as *Isvara prasada* is *karma-yoga*.**

CHAPTER III: THE TOPIC OF KARMA: Arjuna's heart was not set on doing his *karma* .i.e.. fighting the war. He was interested in taking to *Sannyasa* and thereby seek exclusively *sreyas,* or knowledge for *moksha*. He asked Lord Krishna why he was being pushed to perform *karma* when gaining knowledge was praised as the only thing that was capable of giving *moksha*. It was seemingly conflicting.

Lord Krishna replied that a ***sannyasi* exclusively pursues knowledge. A *Karma yogi*, being a *samsari*, pursues knowledge while doing his *karma,* as prescribed by the *sastra*.** The Lord explained that s*annyasa* is of two types: *Vividisa sannyasa* and *Sarva-karma sannyasa*. In *vividisa sannyasa*, the lifestyle of *Sannyasa* (renunciation) is chosen and one exclusively pursues *atma jnana*. ***Sarva-karma sannyasa*** is the end that both a *karma yogi* and a *sannyasi* achieves. It is achieved by knowing that

atma is free from *karma*, that *atma* does not perform any *karma*. It **is renunciation of all *karma* by understanding.**

A ***karma yogi*** understands that living life conforming to *dharma* is living a life in tune with *Isvara*. His likes and dislikes are neutralized and do not rob the mind of the stability and focus needed to pursue *atma jnana*. His **mind becomes contemplative and qualified to receive *atma jnana*.**

CHAPTER IV: TOPIC OF RENUNCIATION OF ACTION THROUGH KNOWLEDGE: Lord Krishna said that he had taught *atma jnana* to Vivasvan, the head of the Solar dynasty. Arjuna raised a question here: he asked, when Lord Krishna's birth is a recent event, how can it be that he taught Vivasvan? Lord Krishna replied that both Arjuna and the Lord had had many earlier births. While the Lord knew them all, Arjuna did not know them. He was not born of *karma-phala*. Whenever *dharma* weakens and *adharma* gains force, *Isvara* appears to re-establish *dharma*.

According to one's own disposition (sattivic, rajasic and tamasic), one can be classified as belonging to one of the four varnas. Although he may be engaged in an occupation different from his disposition, if he follows dharma, does his duty and has the attitude of *prasada buddhi*, he is known as a sattvic person. **The real growth of a person is when he consumes less and contributes more.**

One who understands that he is *sat-chit-ananda atma* has no doership. When doership is not there and action is performed at the body level, no action is actually done as *atma* does not do any action. This is how one can see actionlessness in action. He is no more a samsari and he will accumulate neither *papa* nor *punya* by doing any karma.

CHAPTER V: TOPIC OF RENUNCIATION: A *karma yogi*, by his attitude, neutralizes his likes and dislikes. By prayer he neutralizes *durita* and earns grace in order to become contemplative. He understands " I am Brahman". Both vividisha sannyasa and karma yoga are the means to reach the end of *sarva-karma sannyasa*.

Bhagavan then taught how one can prepare for meditation. One is objective while seeing the sky, mountains and green valley. In a similar manner, **one should do practice to become objective in regard to people whom he loves.** Once the inhibitions of expectations go, love becomes purified.

CHAPTER VI: THE TOPIC OF MEDITATION: The first type of Meditation is thinking about Isvara with a form. *Puja* can be done mentally by visualization of an altar. Otherwise a mantra, whose meaning is *Isvara* with a form, can be chanted mentally.

The second type of meditation is called *nididhyasanam*. It is contemplation on *atma* after the study of Vedanta. *Sravanam* is listening to and studying the sastra – the *pramana* for *atma jananam*. *Mananam* involves removing the doubts coming from outside the pramana. **Nididhyasanam is performed to neutralise unconscious habitual wrong thinking – to remove any *viparita bhavana* that I am not *atma*.**

One who is able to lift himself by his own efforts is a friend to himself. When he understands that wherever the mind goes, there is *Isvara*, his contemplation becomes pleasant. When he sits for *japa*, he gives an auto suggestion: "Whenever my mind moves away, I shall bring it back". By repeated practice and objectivity, he learns to keep the mind focused. His mind will become calm like a lamp protected from the wind.

Arjuna asked what will happen after death to the one who has *sraddha* in the *sastra* but **whose effort is inadequate and therefore has not gained *moksha* in the present *janma*.** Lord Krishna replied that in the next *janma*, **he will be born in a home where there is wealth, values and Vedic tradition and continue the pursuit.** Or, he will be born in a home of a *karma yogi* who has Sastra jnana. In other words, the progress made in this life is not wasted; in the next life, he starts his spiritual evolution from where he left off.

CHAPTER VII: TOPIC OF INDIRECT & IMMEDIATE KNOWLEDGE:

When we analyse what is creation, we understand that it is only word and meaning or name and form. This jagat is a creation put together intelligently to serve a purpose. We have three words to describe reality; *satyam* (exists in three periods of time), *anrtam* (false) and *tuccham* (non-existent). There is one more reality **"anirvachaniyam", or *mithyaa*, which is not available for categorical presentation and inexplicable. This jagat is *mithyaa*. *Mithyaa* is one which has no independent being but depends on others for its being.**

Maya means magic. Previously created objects in the previous creation came to an unmanifest condition. From the unmanifest, this *jagat* becomes manifest. And the one who wields this magic is *Isvara* (the *Maayaavi*). In the creation, the Creator is in the form of created objects with a name, form and function. All that is here is *Isvara*.

Bhagavan talks about four types of *bhaktas* (devotees) in all. *Aartah* is the one who prays only when he is in distress. *Artharthi* is the one who prays for the fulfillment of his desires relating to security and pleasure. *Jijnasu* is the one who seeks the knowledge of *Isvara*. A *Jnani* is the one who recognizes that he is one with *Isvara*.

All the four types of devotees are devoted for various reasons: but they all pray to *Isvara* and earn His grace. The *aartah* grows to become an *artharthi*. An *artharthi* grows to become a *Jijnasu*. And a *jijnasu*, in turn, grows to become a *Jnani*. A **Jnani is the most desired as he recognizes his oneness with *Isvara*.**

After many births one may understand that **'VAASUDEVAH SARVAMITI' – that is, " All that is here is Isvara" –** that *Isvara* is all knowledge and is the efficient cause of this universe. The entire universe exists in *Isvara*, and He is also the material cause of this universe. But such a wise person is very rare.

CHAPTER VIII: TOPIC OF IMPERISHABLE BRAHMAN

The Eighth Chapter begins with Arjuna's question regarding the meaning of some terms: Lord Krishna explained the meaning of those terms. **Brahman** is limitless and not subject to change. **Adhyaatma** is awareness in the physical body. **Karma** refers to the actions that result in repetitive births of living beings. **Adhibhuuta** is the universe subject to change. **Adhidaiva** is Hiranyagarbha. **Adhiyajna** is the Lord who resides in the body.

When one remembers Isvara at the time of death, he may go to svarga or he may be born in a family where there is favourable atmosphere for spiritual growth and moksha. When one chants "**OM**" at the time of death, understanding its meaning as Brahman, he will not have rebirth. **The one who understands the meaning of Brahman will not have rebirth.**

This chapter is chanted as a prayer for the departed jivas.

CHAPTER IX: TOPIC OF THE KING OF KNOWLEDGE, THE KING OF SECRETS

Brahma vidya destroys ignorance about the Self and creates the awareness of the fact that everything is Brahman. Brahma vidya or raja vidya (king among knowledge) reveals that I am Brahman, which is *sat chit ananda*. Brahma vidya will give moksha to the one who is prepared and ready. When a secret is told, it is no more a secret. But **Brahma vidya will remain a secret even after it is told many times, unless the person hearing it is ready.**

When one performs the rituals mentioned in the karma khanda of the Veda, he goes to svarga (a world of enjoyments, music and dance)**. After the exhaustion of his punya in svarga, he is born again in this world**. Getting desirable things that have not been obtained already is yoga. Retaining those desirable things that have been obtained is *ksema*. **Isvara promises that he will take care of yoga and ksema** of those

who always dwell upon him and understand him. The entire jagat is pervaded by him and sustained by him.

Isvara is the maker and material cause of the jagat. The entire jagat has its being in Isvara. Jagat is Brahman but Brahman is not jagat. This is a paradox in Vedanta that can be resolved by understanding.

Isvara wields the power of maya. **Maya is the material cause of this jagat**. The manifest jagat is because of maya. Before creation, Isvara alone was there with all knowledge and the jagat was unmanifest. After creation too, Isvara alone is there with all knowledge and the jagat is manifest.

When one understands Isvara properly, he is considered a Saadhu. His earlier improper conduct if any is not going to continue. He understands all emotions as Isvara's manifestation of psychological order. He will offer his prayers and rituals to Isvara. **He understands Isvara–this is figuratively told that he reaches Isvara.**

CHAPTER X- TOPIC OF THE GLORIES OF THE LORD

The entire universe is a manifestation of Isvara. All the glories that we find in this universe, relating to any person or thing, belong to Isvara. Arjuna prays to Lord Krishna to talk in detail about his glories. The Lord starts by telling that he is meaning of the word "I", the consciousness. He then gives a brief list of his important glories, adding that his glories cannot be fully listed, as they are infinite. He concludes by saying that he is the very existence in all beings.

All attributes that are glorious, rich or powerful are expressions of the Lord's glory. All that is here is Isvara. **An object or person becomes sacred when one recognizes the object as a manifestation of Isvara.**

CHAPTER XI – TOPIC OF THE VISION OF A COSMIC PERSON

Arjuna **prayed to the Lord to show his cosmic form**. The Lord blessed Arjuna with a divine vision and Arjuna could see the brilliant form of the Lord adorned with divine ornaments. **He saw all beings in the cosmic body of the Lord.** He saw celestial beings and celestial objects. The Lord's body appeared with thousands of hands and legs without having any beginning, middle or end.

He saw many persons entering the mouth of the Lord and getting destroyed**.** Arjuna **was terrified by seeing the destructive power of the Lord**. Taittriya Upanisad says if one fails to see oneness, he will be fearful. Brhadaranyaka Upanisad says the one who sees duality will experience fear. **As Arjuna did not include himself in the cosmic form, he was terrified.**

Arjuna repeatedly saluted the Lord. He said that the whole world was pervaded by the Lord. He is the creator of the world. He asked for pardon for taking the liberty of calling the Lord as O! Krishna, O! Yadava, O! Friend as he was ignorant of his glories. He requested the Lord to withdraw the cosmic form as he could not endure it.

All that is here is Isvara. The one having this vision will see the entire universe as the cosmic form of the Lord.

CHAPTER XII- TOPIC OF DEVOTION

Arjuna asked Lord Krishna, which devotee was superior: the devotee worshipping the Lord with a form or the one worshipping the Lord without a form. **The Lord replied that the devotee worshipping the Lord with a form was great, but a Jnani was the most exalted devotee.**

The Lord described **various types of devotees**. One may meditate on the universe as the form of Isvara. One may do his svadharma as an offering to the Lord with the attitude of karma yoga and accept the results as prasada from the Lord.

The Lord lists the **characteristics of a Jnani**. He is compassionate, free from doer-ship, has no hatred for any one and has equanimity. He neither disturbs others nor is he disturbed by others. He is free from elation, intolerance, fear and anxiety.

CHAPTER XIII- TOPIC OF THE NATURE OF KNOWER AND THE KNOWN

Ksetram means the field where crop is raised. Here it refers to one's body through which karma is done, and it also refers to the whole world. **Ksetrajna** is the one who objectifies Ksetram i.e. the whole world, including one's body.

Jnaanam : The Lord talks of 20 important values and says that those who possesses these alone will gain atma jnanam. Hence, the values themselves are termed here as **Jnaanam.** These 20 values are humility, simplicity, harmlessness, accommodation, straightforwardness, reverence for the Teacher, cleanliness, steadfastness, self-discipline, dispassion for sense objects, absence of pride, seeing clearly the defects in birth, death, old age and disease, absence of ownership, absence of excessive affection to relatives, equanimity during desirable and undesirable situations, unswerving devotion to the Lord, seclusion, absence of longing for people's company and always dwelling on self-knowledge.

Jneyam is Brahman who is to be known. Brahman is the creator, sustainer and the one in whom the creation resolves. Brahman is the consciousness in and of all beings.

Purusa is consciousness, independent and changeless. **Prakrti** is dependent on Purusa for its existence and is inert and changing.

Ksetrajna, Jneyam and Purusa are synonyms. Ksetram and Prakrti are synonyms.

One needs to purify his mind by living a life of karma yoga. Later, he should gain atma jnana through jnana yoga, after gaining the required preparedness.

CHAPTER XIV- TOPIC OF THE DIVISION OF THREE GUNAS

Every individual is a combination of three gunas, **sattva, rajas and tamas**. Sattva is thinking, knowing, happiness and cheerful mind. Rajas is ambition and desire. Tamas is simple desire and slothfulness. **One can become sattva predominant** by satsanga: even when one falls short, one can fake it temporarily with the objective of becoming genuinely saatvika and eventually make it. One gets the attitude of karma yoga and accepts the results as Isvara prasada. There is a sameness of mind when there are desirable and undesirable results. This makes the person ready for the study of Vedanta. After gaining the knowledge, **he will be free**. He will not be affected by praise or censure.

CHAPTER XV- TOPIC OF THE WHOLE PERSON

This chapter is chanted at the Gurukulam daily before lunch and dinner. This chapter is chanted before bhiksha in the Ashrams at Rishikesh.

Like Aswatha tree, samsaara is vast and multi-branched. As the leaves keep the tree alive, karmas keep the tree of samsaara going. Just as how the tree can be felled, samsara too can be destroyed with the weapon of knowledge. Those who do not have binding desires and are committed to spiritual pursuit reach the ultimate abode.

Isvara is the light that lights up the sun, moon and the fire. He enlivens and nourishes the jagat. **As the digestive fire, he digests the food**. He gives memory, knowledge and forgetfulness. He is the author and the knower of Vedas.

When one understands the oneness between the jiva and Isvara, who is manifest as the universe, the connection with all that is here is

automatically established. He is the epistemological order, physiological order, and the physical order. **“I am all” is a thing to be understood. This is the vision**.

There are two purushas, one that is destroyed in the form of beings and the other that is not destructible in the form of maya. There is another uttama purusha in the form of Isvara, which pervades and sustains the three worlds. The one who knows Purushottama in this manner becomes the knower of all and gains fulfilment.

CHAPTER XVI - TOPIC OF DESCRIPTION OF BECOMING AND UNBECOMING DISPOSITIONS:

This chapter deals with daivee sampat and aasuree sampat.

A person possessing daivee sampat is endowed with the following wealth: fearlessness, purity of mind, steadiness, capacity to reach out, mastery over sense organs (self-restraint), devotion to Isvara (performing various rituals), study of one’s own Veda on a regular basis, austerity, alignment of thought, word and deeds, straightforwardness, non-violence, truthfulness, resolution of anger, renunciation, calmness, absence of tendency to criticize others, compassion, absence of longing, gentleness, modesty, brilliance, capacity to forget and forgive, endurance, no thought of hurting others and not having ego.

A person having aasuree sampat will have the following dispositions: adharma, pride, arrogance, anger, harshness, untruthfulness, desire, passion, cruelty, pretention, delusion, etc. They suffer pain here and later have to suffer pain in naraka also.

A spiritual seeker needs to live a mindful, alert life by consciously giving up these aasuree sampat and deliberately cultivating daivee sampat till this wealth manifests spontaneously. Only a person endowed with daivee sampat can gain atma jnana.

A person following the injunctions of Sastra will have happiness here and hereafter. Sastra is the means of knowledge to know what is to be done and what is not to be done

CHAPTER XVII – TOPIC OF THE DESCRIPTION OF THE THREE TYPES OF SRADDHA:

This chapter starts with a question of Arjuna to know the fate of the person who does puja with sraddha but not following Sastra. The Lord answered this question by explaining what is sraddha. He told that sraddha is three fold: saattvika, raajasika and taamasika.

One should give up taamasika activities, grow out of raajasika activities and finally go for saattvika activities.

Three fold worship: Sattvika people worship Devatas. Raajasika people worship Yaksas. Taamasika people worship ghosts.

Three fold food: Food that increases longevity, mental clarity, strength, health and happiness are liked by saattvika people. Food that is bitter, sour, salty, hot, pungent and dry and that give pain, sorrow and ill-health are liked by raajasika people. Food that is old, inadequately cooked, kept overnight or impure are liked by taamasika people.

Three fold ritual: Ritual performed as per the Sastra for purifying the mind is known as saattvika ritual. Ritual performed for worldly results or for gaining recognition is raajasika ritual. Ritual performed contrary to Sastra without distribution of food, not giving dakshinaa to priest, and without sraddha is taamasika ritual.

Three fold tapas: Worshiping of Devas and Gurus, purity, straightforwardness, self-discipline, and ahimsa is called tapas (discipline) of physical body. Speech that does not create anxieties, which is true, pleasing and beneficial is called tapas (discipline) of speech. Mental cheerfulness, gentleness, silence, mastery over the mind and purity of thought is called tapas (discipline) of the mind.

Three fold daanam: Daanam when done as duty, given without expecting to get anything in return, in proper place, at proper time, and to a worthy recipient is considered saatvika danam. Daanam that is given expecting something in return or for punya is raajasika. Daanam given improperly at the wrong place and time, and to unworthy recipients and with contempt is taamasika danam

The words **OM, TAT, SAT** separately and together means Brahman. It is auspicious to begin anything by uttering these three words.

CHAPTER XVIII – TOPIC OF FREEDOM AND RENUNCIATION:

Yagna, daana and tapas should not be given up by anybody. They are to be done for purification of the mind.

Three fold tyaga: Renunciation due to some fascination or romanticism about sannyasa is taamasika. Renunciation done due to fear of bodily strain and hence avoidance of doing what is to be done is known as raajasika. Renunciation of attachment towards result of karma is sattvika.

A karma yogi maintains equanimity irrespective of whether the result is desirable, undesirable or a mixture of these two. Atma is neither the doer nor the enjoyer, but due to identification with the body and mind, one does a mistake and identifies himself to be a doer and enjoyer. The identification with body will go only by gaining atma jnana.

Three fold knowledge: The knowledge by which one sees changeless, undivided atma is sattvika. The knowledge by which one sees the apparent difference among varied beings as real is raajasika. The knowledge by which one sees the body alone as atma is taamasika.

Three fold action: The action done with the attitude of karma yoga is sattvika. The action done for personal gain is raajasika. The action born out of delusion is taamasika.

Three fold karta: Sattvic doer is a karma yogi with enthusiasm, cheerfulness and fortitude. Rajasic doer is under the spell of likes and

dislikes and is subject to elation and depression. Tamasic doer is immature, lazy and procrastinates.

Three fold buddhi: Sattvic intellect is the one that knows what to do and what not to do and knows the cause of bondage and the path to freedom. Rajasic intellect wrongly understands what is to be done and not to be done under the spell of likes and dislikes. Tamasic intellect mistakes adharma as dharma.

Three fold resolve: Sattvic resolve is to maintain and engage all sense organs in the spiritual path. Rajasic resolve is to pursue worldly pursuits mainly dharma, artha and kama. Tamasic resolve is not thinking properly, not giving up excess sleep, fear, sorrow, sadness and intoxication.

Three fold happiness: Sattvic happiness is that which looks like poison in the beginning but is like nectar in the end. Rajasic happiness is that which is like nectar in the beginning and like poison in the end. Tamasic happiness is that which is born out of sleep, laziness and indifference.

Karma Yoga Attitude: The duties of the four varnas are prescribed by the Sastra, based on one's own disposition. **One should stay with one's own karma and contribute to the society with the attitude of performing his karma as an offering (puja) to Isvara.** This attitude of karma yoga will help one to gain the mental purity necessary to pursue atma jnana.

Dharma Vyadha: In Mahabaratha, the story of Dharma Vyadha is presented as a duty bound person. He is a butcher by profession, but due to his commitment to svadharma and pitru seva, gains fullness. He teaches a Brahmana what dharma is.

Gita teaching is summarized as follows: One does his svadharma with karma yoga attitude. He neutralizes his likes and dislikes. He cultivates compassion. He wins over anger. He frees himself from a sense of possession. He frees himself from ego. He accepts the results as prasada from Isvara with equanimity.

He learns the Sastra from a Guru. He knows himself to be a non-doer of action even while performing action. He contemplates on the teaching that he, himself is the meaning of the word satisfaction, not bound by time and is the very meaning of purnatvam (fullness). He always stays with the knowledge that he is Brahman.

His mind is abiding in the Lord. The Lord promises that such a devotee will reach Him. **Giving up the karmas, when one takes refuge in the Lord, he will be released from all karmas and he will not grieve. He will gain moksha.**

Arjuna told that his moha (delusion) has gone and he is no more deluded as he has regained his, his clarity in understanding. He was ready to act as per Lord's instructions. The Lord replied that Arjuna may do whatever he wanted.

The Lord said that the **one who teaches Bhagavad Gita to others is his dearest devotee**. The **one who studies and recites Gita actually worships the Lord in the form of jnana yagna**. **Even a person listening to the Gita will gain punya and go to auspicious worlds.**

Wherever there is Lord Krsna and Arjuna bearing the bow, there is victory, wealth and justice.

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